

THE LIBRARY OF CALIFORNIA ... FOR HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIANS

Health sciences libraries have a long history of mutual cooperation in order to provide for the information needs of their clientele. In recent years, health sciences libraries have seen a dramatic increase in the amount of information in their subject fields, in the costs of publications, and in the quantity and range of resources requested by their users. The result of these developments has been to increase the importance of this traditional interlibrary cooperation and of forming new cooperative arrangements with other types of libraries to meet all the information needs of clients.

The Library of California is a statewide plan to bring together the information and resources of all 8,000 California libraries (health sciences, special, college, corporate, historical society, law, museum, newspaper, prison, public, research, school, university) for the use of all Californians, from each California library. There is no membership fee for participation.

Federal funding has supported cooperation among health sciences libraries to date. Now the State of California is seeking to expand upon those programs. The Library of California also expands upon the California Library Services Act, a resource-sharing program limited to public libraries, and extends it to all eligible libraries statewide. The State role is to reimburse all libraries for services they provide to people who are not part of their regular clientele and to create a platform for resource-sharing. It complements existing programs such as those of the National Library of Medicine, enhancing them through technology and links to other types of libraries.

HOW COULD IT BENEFIT THE INSTITUTION? Examples:

A hospital library providing consumer health services to its patient population has little space or funding to develop a comprehensive collection to meet these needs. As a member of the Library of California, the hospital librarian can quickly obtain consumer health materials from the local public library and other consumer collections to support requests from the patients.

A hospital administrator researching the use of outsourcing clinical laboratory services needs information about the financial and business background of the companies he is considering. Because the hospital library is a member of the Library of California which can negotiate statewide licenses at a considerable discount, staff have access to this type of information from expensive legal and business databases which the library could not otherwise afford.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- The Library of California greatly increases the information pool available through the health sciences library, expanding it to literally billions of dollars worth of library resources
- It is a cost-effective way to enhance health sciences library services, taking advantage of economies of scale in such areas as shared training and jointly-negotiated database licenses
- The program enables the health sciences library to focus its purchases on its primary mission, while enabling it to provide access to business, legal, social, and other topics less central to healthcare
- It provides new state-funded grant opportunities for health sciences libraries in such areas as technology upgrades, preservation, and coordinated collection development
- The Library of California enables the institution to provide service to the community, but on its own terms: there is local control over what is shared with other libraries and how it is done